DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 267 483 EA 018 186

AUTHOR Entwisle, Doris R.
TITLE Social Psychology and Social Context. Draft.
PUB DATE 2 Apr 85
NOTE 14p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Chicago, IL, March 31-April 4, 1985).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Viewpoints (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Child Development; *Cognitive Development; Elementary Secondary Education; Family Influence; Parent Influence; *Psychological Studies; School Role; *Self Concept; Self Esteem; Social Development; Social Environment; *Social Influences; *Social Psychology

ABSTRACT

Progress in developmental/social psychology has occurred in three major areas: (1) knowledge of cognitive development, (2) knowledge involving the various concepts related to the self, and (3) knowledge of how to take explicit account of social context. These areas can be integrated by taking a "life course approach," which emphasizes the reciprocal and transactional nature of the relations between individuals and society as well as the continuous nature of development and the potential for change. Numerous studies have recently yielded new insights into children's thought processes and the relationship of performance to stages of development. Also, there appears to be a direct relationship between age and the level of abstraction present in self-concept; current studies may show how children elaborate notions about the self. Knowledge about modeling the social context has increased through improved analysis techniques so that realistic questions can now be asked regarding the effects of family configuration or parental socialization practices on children's educational attainment and regarding the confounding of home and school influences. Current research needs are in the areas of multicohort, long-range, nationally representative longitudinal studies of children and the differences in children's socioemotional or affective development. Two pages of references conclude the paper. (GJ)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Doris R. Entwisle

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

ED267483

Social Psychology and Social Context

Doris R. Entwisle

The Johns Hopkins University

Draft

Do not cite or quote without permission

AERA presentation, Chicago, Illinois, April 2, 1985

EA 017 186

What do we know in 1985 that we did not know in 1965? For me this is a hard question because I am used to asking the opposite question: What don't we know? What are the gaps in knowledge that we need to research? Notwithstanding, in the next few minutes I will take (for me) the unnatural view and sketch my impression of how the knowledge base in developmental/social psychology has increased in the past 20 years. I will focus on three major areas. In two of these areas, progress has been substantial. These are (1) knowledge of cognitive development and (2) knowledge involving the various concepts related to the self. In the third area, which knowledge of how to take explicit account of social context, progress has been almost unbelievable. Cognitive development and development of the self do not proceed in a social vacuum. In fact, the more we learn, the clearer it becomes that even the Piagetian sequences of cognitive development can vary across social contexts. So in my view the biggest advance in the knowledge base in the past 20 years consists of the methodological and statistical tools that permit us to model individual change inside a realistic social context as well as to model the dynamic interplay between individuals and social structure.

Before going on to specifics, I should point out that all three of these bodies of knowledge can be integrated by taking a "life course approach". The line of thinking underlying a life course approach is not well enough developed at present to be called a theory but this approach calls attention to certain themes that link the three areas of research I am concerned with today. One theme is the reciprocal and transactional nature of the relations between individuals and their social contexts. Teachers affect children, but children affect teachers. For example, younger sibs of bright children by their very identity induce

high expectations in teachers who have taught their sibs (Seavor, 1973). Another major theme of life course ideas is the continuous nature of development and the ever-present potential for change. There is less constancy in development that we used to believe, especially between early childhood and the later stages of life (Kagan, 1980). In an on-going study of ours, some children do much better over their first grade year in school than we would have predicted taking into account their initial test scores, parents' educational background, and several other potent variables (Pallas, Cadigan, Entwisle and Alexander, 1985). So individuals can act in ways to enhance, or diminish, their own development, and they can do this at every stage in life. Kohn's (1984) analyses of effects of work on personality, for example, show that cognitive processes continue to show plasticity throughout the life span.

Life course themes, which are particularly apparent in the writings of Elder, Kagan and Brim, represent a profound change in the Zeitgeist of social and developmental psychology over the last decade. Emergence of these themes is part of a widespread movement in social science generally toward study of change.

I expect these themes will continue to be influential for the foreseeable future. In 1965 we hoped we could devise strong preschool programs that would improve children's life chances. A recent meta-analysis of the lasting outcomes of some of these preschool programs indicates they were probably more successful than we earlier thought (Lazar and Darlington, 1982). The programs defended some children against later repeating a grade, for example. But we no longer think mainly in terms of a "dose of cognitive training" or "extra practice in network English" as remedies for the dearth of socialization resources in disadvantaged

homes. Nor do we think that an "extra dose of income" will necessarily glue families back together (Tuma and Hannan, 1984). So the life course approach has changed the whole tenor of our thinking in terms of problems we select and how we approach them.

Let me now turn specifically to each of the three areas of knowledge in which I see substantial progress over the past 20 years.

Cognitive development first. Returns from research on cognitive development with school-age children, although less dramatic so far than returns from research on cognition with infants, has exceeded the wildest dreams we had in the early '60s. At that time there were only a handful - perhaps as few as 5 - experimental studies of thinking in the psychological literature. The psychology of learning was comprised of several schools, associated with names like Tolman, Hull, Lewin, and Skinner. But very little of the research on the psychology of learning had any direct relation to schooling. Most of the research was conducted in the laboratory with animals. We knew that partial reinforcement worked better than 100% reinforcement, and there were even a few studies confirming this fact with children, but the matter rested there.

Contrast this with the state of our knowledge today. Hundreds of neo-Piagetians study children's thought processes. And this work has yielded a rich harvest. We now believe there are four times when large-scale reorganizations of children's behavior occur. These changes signal fairly universal steps in cognitive development. The ages when these changes occur coincide with the period of school attendance - 4 to 18. At around age 4 children can deal with representations. They can relate two social categories like teacher/student. By age 6 or 7 they can operate upon concrete categories. For example, they can under-

stand role intersections, how a husband and wife could be a principal and a teacher, respectively, in the same school. By 10 or 12 children can generalize across whole series of concrete categories. They can understand, for example, the concept "supervisor" across a series of job settings. They have the capacity to think in hypothetical terms. "If I were the supervisor, I would...". The fourth stage, in late adolescence, involves being able to generate new hypotheses. Hopefully we have all reached this stage.

Having said this, however, the consensus is that children's performances do not adhere strictly to stages of development. The stage a child is in at any given age can vary widely depending on the child's environmental context. By the time children start school, they may already be in different developmental trajectories depending on their differential abilities and experiences up to that time. A few studies indicate that different children and different situations may even produce different sequences of development, but this research is just beginning (Collins, 1984). While recognizing more flexibility in development, we must acknowledge that early development can set at least loose boundaries on later developmental stages. In the last 20 years, we have had numerous demonstrations that the amount children learn in one school year is proportional to what they knew at the beginning. (See e.g. Coleman et al., 1966). In our own ongoing work, it is very clear that children who had to repeat first grade knew less when they started school than their promoted classmates did, but they gained significantly less over the first grade year as well. Since regression effects would run in a counter direction, this failure of the repeaters to thrive in

a school environment is likely even more severe than their small numerical test gains indicate.

The "central unresolved issue in cognitive development" at present is how the child and the environment collaborate (Collins, 1984). The Piagetians have convinces us the child is active. On the one hand, the child produces much of his/her own development. On the other hand, society aims to induce certain kinds of development by sending children to school. The life course approach impels us to figure out how children's cognitive development and the social context interact. There are certainly some regularities in children's cognitive development but still wide variation across cultures.

The second major theme to which I want to call your attention is the surge of interest in the self, whether self-concept, self esteem, self image, self-awareness, and so on. Parenthetically, I must say that this is one of the few areas of research where there has been genuine collaboration between sociologists and psychologists. The research of Rosenberg and Brookover, for example, takes into account research by Wiley and Coopersmith, and vice versa. Unfortunately such collaboration has been rarer on cognitive aspects of school learning.

Back to the self. We have learned that with increasing age the child's conception of self becomes more and more abstract. By age 8 children appreciate that the mind and body are separate and that they themselves can control their behavior. Indeed, school age children have an elaborate system of self knowledge. They are aware of a physical self, a social self, an academic self, and so on. There is also a general finding of constancy of the self. Development of a sense of self is important because it must precede the development of a set of

personal standards. Certainly by second grade and probably earlier, the process of self-comparison is present. First-graders know who can run the fastest, who can read the best, who is better looking than they are. They can also compare their own behavior under various circumstances. We asked a first grade girl "How good are you at being honest - very good, good, fairly good, fairly bad, or very bad and so on)." Her response: "Sometimes I'm very good, sometimes I'm very bad." Self-comparison implies both that a sense of self and a set of personal standards exist.

Studies now in progress (e.g. Parsons, Entwisle and Alexander) may enlighten us on exactly how children elaborate notions about the self. These studies capitalize on the modeling advances I will mention shortly. For example, by combining measurement and structural models of the self, we can explore the factorial structure of self esteem at the same time we try to understand the patterns of influence that are exerted on self-esteem by the social context. For first graders there may be only one clear factor representing self-esteem, but by third grade there may be two or three factors representing self-esteem. What are the antecedents of these factors? If one factor responds to teachers' expectations, the child's past academic performance and the like, while other factors do not, we could have much more convincing evidence of the validity of a factor representing "academic self image" than has traditionally been at hand in the way of evidence for validating affective or socioemotional constructs. For the most part the self concept is investigated in highly artificial situations, and validity of the various self indices continues to be problematic. But now we have a way out.

The third major theme is knowledge about modeling the social context. It is startling to look back and see what we could not do in 1965. Some models, like log linear ones, were just on the horizon in 1965. Goodman in 1964 published a paper on how to isolate the 3-way interaction in a 2 x 2 x 2 analysis of categoric variables, for example. Today we routinely do analyses with any number of categories and variables, assuming we have sufficient data. Duncan's first paper on path analysis appeared in 1966. Now such analyses appear in all the social science literatures. In 1965 even models that had been well known for a long time were not routinely used. For example, around 1965 or 1966, because we needed some examples in a course we were teaching, Arthur Stinchcombe and I looked around in the sociological literature for instances of factor analysis. We found only two. Today factor analysis procedures in sociology are so routine, we have the opposite problem - factor analysis substituting for theoretical analysis. Twenty years ago most people did not think in terms of a general linear model or even understand the correspondence between regression and analysis of variance. Contrast that with the situation today - we are now into our sixth or seventh version of LISREL. We are making rapid strides in modeling discrete phenomena with time-varying rates of change (Tuma and Hannan, 1984). Without high speed computers and the sophisticated software we now take for granted, it would be gratuitious to ask penetrating questions about how development of the self and development of cognitive capacities interact across social contexts because we would have no way to answer such complicated questions. We have come a long way indeed.

The changes I have been talking about are of enormous significance for understanding the social psychology of education because they enable

us to ask realistic questions. We can ask serious questions about effects of family configuration or parental socialization practices on children's educational attainment. A paper that came out a month or two ago (Alwin and Thornton, 1984) describes the relative impact of family background on children's school attainment at different stages in childhood. To the extent it is possible to tell with their longitudinal data from 3 Detroit counties, Alwin and Thornton conclude that family influences on elementary students are probably greater than those same influences are upon secondary students. And this kind of research on social context is essential if we are to understand the schooling process. We know parents and peers are important sources of influence on secondary students but obviously the group of significant others exists long before high school. It is just not sensible to assume that life histories before ninth grade are irrelevant to eventual educational attainment.

A persistent issue, not yet resolved, but better understood now than in 1966, is the confounding of home and school influences. For secondary school attainment, school differences are small (Mosteller and Moynihan, 1972). But Heyns (1978) rephrased the question. Instead of asking whether some schools have greater effects than others, she asked how school compares with no school. In her seminal study of 6th and 7th graders in Atlanta, she showed that relatively affluent children continue to gain academic competence over the summer, whereas children who are less advantaged do not gain over the summer. When school is out, middle class children get the resources they need for their cognitive growth to continue, whereas children in less affluent circumstances do not.

In my view this is a landmark piece of research. It follows Mosteller and Moynihan's directive (p.53): "The summer loss effect for lower class

students should certainly be followed up...". Schools probably do help compensate for the dearth of socialization resources in less affluent homes and perhaps duplicate the resources in more affluent homes. Now the question is: exactly what kinds of resources and exactly what kinds of achievement are involved? Likely a composite verbal measure, which is what Heyns focused on, would respond more to summer surroundings than, say, a measure of mathematics achievement. Hopefully there will be data on this question before long.

During the past 20 years there has been no nationally based study following even one cohort of children from the time they started school to the end of their educational careers. The National Survey of Children, sponsored by the Foundation for Child Development, is the closest approximation. A multi-cohort, long-range, nationally representative longitudinal study of children has so far presented a price tag that is too large. But it is a national need. Such a project could enlighten us on some of the root causes of differences in children's affective or socioemotional development. An example of the pay-off from this kind of research can be found in Seltzer (1982). Using two cycles of the Health Examination Survey of the NCES to examine children's psychological well-being, she shows a complete absence of association between mother's labor force participation and indices of children's psychological well-being. She also shows that children in middle childhood and in adolescence whose mothers completed more years of schooling have higher levels of psychological well-being than children whose mothers had fewer years of education, net of relevant controls. A large-scale study of a suitable sample is a faster route to strong inference than the best of meta-analyses in my opinion, and may be cheaper over the long run as well.

Until recently there has been little emphasis on differences in children's socioemotional or affective development. There has been a tendency to focus on cognitive explanations for school achievement and to ignore the reciprocities between cognitive and affective development. But a child's self-image is itself a key outcome of schooling, of course, and predicts other outcomes. The distinction between self-image as outcome and self-image as mediator is often blurred or left latent.

Fortunately, since we can now model reciprocal relationships, we can examine feedback mechanisms. How does the achievement of children affect their self-images? How do children's self-images affect achievement? Certainly low achievement is associated with a poor self-image. But for young children beginning school, the causal flow seems to be in the direction of the self-image affecting achievement (Entwisle and Hayduk, 1982). For secondary students the causal flow seems to be in the opposite direction - low achievement leads to a diminished self image (Gottfredson, 1980). With the modeling techniques now at our disposal, we should be able to sort out some of these structural changes in development. The immediate future looks very exciting.

REFERENCES

Alwin, D. F., and Thornton, A. 1984. "Family origins and the schooling process: Early vs. late influence". American Sociological Review, 49:784-802.

Coleman, J. S., Campbell, E. G., Hobson, C. J., McPartland, J., Mood, A., Weinfeld, F. D., and York, R. L. 1966. Equality of Educational Opportunity. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.

Collins, W. A. 1984. Development During Middle Childhood. Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press.

Duncan, O. D. 1966. "Path analysis: Sociological examples." American Journal of Sociology, 72:1-16.

Entwisle, D. R. and Alexander, K. L. 1985. Children's transition to full time schooling, in preparation.

Entwisle, D. R. and Hayduk, L. A. 1982. Early Schooling. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press.

Goodman, L. A. 1964. "Simple methods of analyzing three-factor interaction in contingency tables." Journal of American Statistical Association, 59:319-352.

Gottfredson, D. C. 1980. Personality and Persistence in Education: A Longitudinal study. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Psychological Association.

Hayes, D. P. and Grether, J. The School Year and Vacations: When do Students Learn?" Paper presented at the Eastern Sociological Association April, 1969. Mimeo. Cited by Mosteller, F. and Moynihan, D. P. (eds.) On Equality of Opportunity. New York: Vintage, 1972.

Heyns, B. 1978. Summer Learning and the Effects of Schooling. New York: Academic Press.

Kagan, J. 1980. "Perspectives on continuity". Pp.26-74 in O.G. Brim and J. Kagan (eds.) Constancy and Change in Human Development. Cambridge: Harvard.

Kohn, M. L. and Schooler, C. 1984. Work and Personality. Norwood, N.J.: Ablex.

Lazar, I. and Darlington, R. "Lasting effects of early education. 1982. Monograph of the Society for Research in Child Development. Serial No. 195, Vol. 47, Nos. 2-3.

Pallas, A. ., Cadigan, D. ., Entwisle, D. R., and Alexander, K. L. 1985. First grade outliers, in preparation.

Parsons, J. E., M idgley, C. M. and Adler, T. F. "Age-related changes in the school environment: Effects on achievement motivation. In J. H. Nichols (ed.) The Development of Achievement Motivation. Greenwich, Conn: JAI Press, in press.

Seaver, W. B. 1973. "Effects of naturally-induced teacher expectancies. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 28:333-42.

Seltzer, J. A. Family Characteristics and Children's Psychological Well-being. Working Paper 81-18, Center for Demography and Ecology, University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin, January, 1982.

Tuma, N. B. and Hannan, M. T. 1984. Social Dynamics. New York: Academic.